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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003498

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TAGS: EAID KDEM PGOV AF

SUBJECT: KARZAI POLICY CHIEF OUTLINES STRATEGY FOR THE NEXT  
ELECTIONS

REF: A. KABUL 3054

1B. KABUL 1198

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) Republic Party Chairman and President Karzai's Chief of Policy Sebghatullah Sanjar outlined in a September 24 conversation with POLCOUNS his plan for winning the 2009 presidential election. Sanjar's strategy is based on "drawing a line between those who favor the Constitution and those who are against it." He identified four emerging political groupings -- pre-Soviet, Mujahidin, Tribal groupings, and new parties -- and expressed his opinion that Karzai needs to accept the inevitability of political parties and work in earnest to assemble a coalition based on the vision of Afghan unity that he represents. END SUMMARY.

KARZAI'S POLITICAL STRATEGIST

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12. (SBU) Sebghatullah Sanjar, one of President Karzai's key political strategists, outlined for POLCOUNS September 24 his role as a political problem-solver and his plan for helping Karzai win the 2009 presidential election. Sanjar has played an instrumental role in finding acceptable ways to implement politically difficult Afghan Compact Benchmarks, such as the Senior Appointments Board. Sanjar also helped craft Karzai's position on transitional justice. Sanjar guided the government's effort to reassure Afghans that transitional justice does not mean executing people "as with Saddam Hussein," but rather making sure perpetrators abandon their old ways. While the Afghanistan Compact is government policy, it still needs to be sold to the people, Sanjar said.

The government must do a better job of getting the message out, he added, by promoting success stories like the development of the Afghan National Army. He highlighted the challenge of managing expectations by explaining that building a government takes time, "just like building roads and power stations."

KARZAI'S ELECTION STRATEGY

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¶ 13. (C) Sanjar outlined a strategy for the 2009 presidential elections based on "drawing a line between those who favor the Constitution and those who are against it." He believes the Afghan people support a unified Afghanistan under the existing constitution, acknowledging that if this is to translate into support for Karzai in the next election, "we must deliver, especially security and a vision of Afghan unity." He said the government will try to convince the people that "both issues are in their hands and that working with the government is the best way to achieve them." He added that "people are ready to support us, but we cannot wait for them to come to us; we need to reach out." Sanjar described the establishment of Jelani Popal's new Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) as an opportunity to gain votes by extending reliable government services to the local level. (NOTE: Sanjar was on the four-person panel that Karzai assembled to design the new office (ref A). END NOTE.)

¶ 14. (C) Sanjar contrasted his approach to that of the opposition (he specifically referred to the United Front), where the focus is on Mujahidin roots or narrow tribal interest. By definition, he argued, these are "opponents of national unity." The key, he said, will be offering a program based on unity and security under a united banner with one leader and one candidate. "If we can do this," he said, given the fragmented nature of the opposition, "we will win." (NOTE: This assumes not only that the anti-Constitutionalists will be divided and in the minority, but also that Karzai can keep pro-Constitution presidential aspirants -- such as MOF Ahady, MOE Atmar, and MOD Wardak -- in the tent and satisfied. END NOTE.) Sanjar said we can

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expect near-term changes to the cabinet and governors as one means of holding together this pro-Constitution coalition.

#### POLITICAL FACTIONS

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¶ 15. (SBU) Sanjar believes that Karzai will have to assemble his coalition by working with new and emerging political parties. He described four types of political groupings: (1) those that existed before the Soviet occupation (e.g. Finance Minister Ahady's Afghan Millat); (2) political groupings that have their roots in the anti-Soviet jihad (e.g. the United Front); (3) tribal groupings (e.g. Hazaras and Jumbesh), and; (4) newly emerging parties (e.g. his own Republic Party). He noted they can be broadly categorized into two sets: those that support the Constitution and those that demand constitutional change. While old parties have a bad reputation, he said, new parties are struggling to develop any reputation at all.

¶ 16. (SBU) The challenge will be to develop a pro-Constitution coalition -- including Sanjar's own Republic Party -- from among these emerging parties. Sanjar noted that, while the Republic Party is trying to identify "like-minded MPs" and form the core of this coalition, the United Front is trying to recruit diverse parties and factions to support its vision for Constitutional change, i.e. a loose parliamentary system and elected governors (ref B). He noted that the United Front may be hobbled by the fact that there are so many prominent individuals who assume they should lead that ticket.

#### COMMENT

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¶ 17. (C) Karzai has trusted Sanjar to manage some of the thornier political issues confronting the Palace. Sanjar wants to help Karzai, who lack a political party of his own, to craft his re-election strategy. Sanjar believes Karzai has gotten off to a late start in appreciating the need to work through -- or at least with -- organized parties to implement a coherent political campaign and get out his

message. Nevertheless, Karzai appears to be calculating he can win re-election by presenting himself to the electorate as the only truly national political figure associated with a unified Afghanistan.

WOOD